1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

expressed also in the speeches by the marriage sureties. The couple are exhorted to refer disputes to the sureties, and to consult the diviner in case of sickness.[1] After the rite these two sureties have special responsibilities towards the couple; grievances are referred to them, and they must be present when adultery cases are heard in court. If the marriage witness ceremony has not been performed, the relationship is not regarded as legal and no adultery compensation can be claimed by the husband.

Divorce used to be a private affair, which was merely signalized by one party giving to the other an arrow as a token of separation.[2] Nowadays all divorce cases go to court. The woman is usually asked to choose between her husband and the adulterer, and the compensation paid to the former, if she decides to leave him, is higher—amounting to about 10s. A man can be sent away from the village by his wife's kin, but if he has given no grounds for divorce he can claim compensation and will also take back any gifts made to his wife. A few small gifts to his mother-in-law are not reclaimed. Divorces are easily obtained and frequent. Grounds for the divorce of a man may include failure to pay hut tax, one of the specific duties of the husband.

The custom of making a marriage payment is recorded by Johnson[3] (on the east coast of Lake Nyasa) as a relatively new adoption. When given it is divided between the bride's father, mother, and mother's brother and brother.[4]

Slavery

Domestic slavery was an important institution in the Yao social system. Slaves were obtained by capture, purchase, or in compensation for injury.[5] A man would pay a debt by giving slaves (wives or members of his matrilineal kin group) to his creditors.[6] A man might voluntarily enslave himself to a man having charge of many women, as a means of obtaining a wife.[7] The children of a free man and a slave woman were not emancipated, as their father could not take them from the village of their mother's master, who had the right to sell them.[8] Slaves took part in the ordinary life of the village; women slaves ranked as junior wives of their masters and shared the usual work of women. Men might be supplied with guns for hunting or might accompany their masters to war, trade for them, spin, weave, sew, make baskets.[9] The institution of domestic slavery was an expression of a dominant motif in Yao culture—the association of status with a large number of dependents. Its abolition by the British was in itself a major blow to the prestige and authority of the chiefs.

Information about the social organization of the Yao in Portuguese East Africa is scanty, but it is in agreement with what is known of the Nyasaland Yao; Heckel, who knew the Yao in Lindi district, Tanganyika Territory, confirms the correctness of Stannus's account of the South Nyasa Yao.

The Yao came into Nyasaland in small parties of kinsmen. Their experience and their superior weapons soon enabled them to dominate the Nyanja among whom they settled, and today they dominate the population of the Southern Province. They are organized into loose groups of villages, under petty, independent chiefs. They seem

[1] Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 245; Hynde, 1895; Johnson, 5, 1922, pp. 69–73; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i; Werner, 1906, pp. 129–32.
[2] 1922, pp. 72–3.
[3] Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 280.
[4] Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 280.
[5] Werner, 1906, pp. 152–3; Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 237.
[6] Stigand, 1909, p. 122 (not a reliable source).
[7] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 166–7.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Werner, 1906, p. 273.

1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

cipate yearly in the great initiation festival for boys and girls. Consequently as they repeat each year the lessons of their own initiation, the ceremonies are the main vehicle of Yao culture.[1]

There are also two Moslem ceremonies:

(1) *Jandu*, the boys' Moslem baptism, which takes about seven days, and is usually worked in with *lupanda*:

(2) *Nsondo*, the girls' Moslem baptism, which is the same as *jandu*, but usually quite separate from *ciputu*. It is important that the wife of a Moslem should have her *nsondo* so that she knows how to prepare the food properly at Ramadan.

Menstrual and Other Taboos

Menstruation is held to be dangerous. A special mat is used by the woman during this time, and is rolled up and kept during the rest of the cycle. The hut is completely replastered after menstruation. Intercourse during menses leads to disease of the man. Sexual contact is dangerous to persons at certain other periods: during initiation ceremonies, during mourning, and for babies who have not been through the protective rite. The danger is thought to lie in *ndaka*, a dread disease characterized by swelling. This may be transmitted by salt in the food. Deaths are often attributed to 'salt'. Much of the significance of the mourning is that medicines are prepared which protect the mourners against the dangers attendant on sexual activity.

Burial Rites

News of a death must be sent to the chief by a messenger carrying a single fowl. The chief gives a present of calico for wrapping the body, and a goat for the burial men. These are called *awilo*, neighbours unrelated to the dead, who volunteer for certain duties. They prepare the body for burial and carry it in procession to the graveyard outside the village. No uninitiated person is allowed to see the funeral. All who attend the burial are prohibited from sexual intercourse for one month. After this time the prohibition is lifted by a ceremony of beer drinking and feasting, and on the following day all fires in the village are extinguished, and then relit, and the mourners are shaved. A year later beer is brewed for a final ceremony.

For a period after her husband's death a widow is unclean, and has to be purified by ritual intercourse with a man who is paid. The widow is not allowed to remarry for two or three years. A widower leaves his wife's village, after receiving a parting gift. The widows of ordinary persons are not inherited. If a man has himself a 'name' (rank and social position), he has an heir, who inherits also the wives of his predecessor. But if the heir (the maternal nephew) has married a cross-cousin (mother's brother's daughter) he would not consider the wife's mother as his inherited wife.

Before the burial the dead man's hut used to be destroyed, together with his possessions. Immediately afterwards a consultation is held as to whether retaliatory action against sorcerers is called for. The *awilo*'s duties include not only the conducting of the burial, but also the subsequent inquiry and the conduct of the second ceremony, the beer drinking, at which they shave the mourners. A man who has

[1] Main sources for girls' initiation: Heckel, 1933, p. 19; Stannus, 1, 1910, pp. 184–7; 4, 1922, pp. 269–74; Stannus and Davey, 1913; Duff, 1903, pp. 312–15; Abdullah, 1919, pp. 16–17; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 225–30; Werner, 1906, pp. 126–7; Johnston, 1897, p. 410.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

villages, however, the headman's activities may be as circumscribed by ritual prohibitions as the chief's are.

The village headman is subject not only to mystical dangers but also to other dangers deriving from his position of authority. It is significant that villagers never go to a diviner to find out the cause of a village headman's death. When I asked informants why this was so, they said, 'Well, what's the use of it? He has enemies on all sides in the village who are trying to kill him with their magic.' In harmony with this view of village headmanship, the symbolic object which represents the village headman in the diviners' gourds I have seen, is a small ring of grass (*singwa*), a copy of the grass cushion women place on their heads when they are carrying loads. This symbolizes the ring of enemies which surrounds the village headman. The saying 'the tortoise defecates on the one who carries it',[1] usually applied to chieftainship, applies equally well to a village headman.

A village headman may expect little material benefit from his position of authority. If he is an Administrative village headman he may be paid a small annuity of 5*s*. or 10*s*.[2] Returning labour migrants may give him a blanket or a military overcoat, or perhaps a few shillings, but this is not usual. If he is not a strict Moslem he will almost certainly be given a pot of beer from every brewing made for sale in the local 'club house'. On the other hand, if an important stranger, particularly a White official, arrives in the village he feels he must give his guest a chicken. It is mannerly to reciprocate with another gift, but not all Whites know this, or, if they do, do not observe it. In particular if the chief comes to his village, he will be expected to entertain him and here can expect no recompense—the chief 'eats from his country'.

The Yao know that the position of headman is no sinecure. Frequently the one chosen to succeed refuses to accept the position, especially if he is well placed in employment. It is significant that the word for an heir is *litegwa*[3]—the one who is trapped. An

[1] *Ngonjo jikunyela nsyene liwajigele.*

[2] Until recently this was true. As I was leaving the field in 1949, I heard that the Administration had decided to abandon this system in favour of one in which only group headmen would be remunerated.

[3] Substantive form of the passive of the verb *kutega*—to set a trap as for animals. This word is not widely known, especially among the younger Yao.

765 might not break up for a week, but the practice was often modified to some degree, people returning to their homes during the day and coming back each night to sleep in the deceased's village. At the present time, there is a tendency to cut the proceedings short, and the mourners generally disperse on the second day after the funeral. This period of waiting is usually whiled away by playing and singing *chindimba*.

768 On the day before the company leaves the village — now, often on the day after the 765 funeral — the ceremony of shaving the head takes place. The *awilo*, assisted in the case of a large party, by those who helped at the burial, shave the heads of all the dead man's relatives. When this is completed, they begin to tear down the deceased's house. The grass from the roof, with the hair removed from the heads of the relatives, is carried to the cross-roads and burned. The walls of earth are torn down and made into a heap; on the top, a stick is raised, and at its base is placed the dead man's snuff box. Sometimes a cactus euphorbia, *mpachi*, is planted on the mound and cassava round about. The snuff box is kept replenished with snuff. This, with the cassava, is reserved for the *awilo;* no one else may partake of them.

While the house is being pulled down, the chief *mbilo* ties around the neck of the widow a single string of beads or a small piece of calico, *ng'onji*. After the house has been demolished, the *awilo* return to their homes and on the following morning, everyone else departs.

767 The position of *mbilo* is a strange one. Every man in the course of his life probably acts as undertaker for some friend; many have probably performed the service several times. He receives no regular payment, but beads, and, nowadays, coins are often thrown into the pot of water with which he wets the heads of those he shaves after the funeral, and he has the freedom of the village in which he has so acted forever afterward, the degree of freedom being determined by the distance which he has travelled to officiate. When Wandalama died, a headman named Chisui from Makanjila's on Lake Nyasa, over a hundred miles away, acted as one of the *awilo*. The occasions on which he revisited Malemya's village are [431] well remembered, as they were marked by much frolicking and some obscenity. He was the recipient of enormous presents of fowls, sheep, and anything else he cared to take, and having commandeered men from the village to carry these gifts for him, he would leave, accompanied by all the people, yelling and shouting their joy at seeing him again.

Any fowls or other provisions that friends may present to the deceased's relatives at the time of the funeral to help defray expenses are given to the *awilo;* no one else may eat them. Some may be kept against the next death in the family.

768 A few days after the funeral, recourse is had to the chief to settle whether any action 622 must be taken in regard to the cause of the death. Some near relative of the dead man will be chosen for this purpose; he must not be shaved by the *awilo* at the time of the funeral. The consultation takes place at some secluded spot outside the village. The chief always brings some one with him to witness what is said. On arriving at the appointed place, the chief salutes the unshaven mourner who is probably accompanied by other relatives, and

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

843 538 when in child-birth there is delay in delivery it is said of the woman "*Akolokwe*," "she is stuck," from *ku-kolokwa* "to be suspended, to be caught by a thorn"; *wajoja*, well dressed, is a slang exclamation meaning "everything, everything is out!" The verse refers, of course, as all obstetricians will recognize, to the moment of crowning of the oncoming head during parturition when it appears to be stuck; then suddenly it slips over the perineum and "everything, everything is out."

843 533 The *nakanga* now gives way to the songs of the other women. In different districts different versions of the songs are sung, but the other women will quickly pick up the refrain of the song sung by a woman who has come in from some distance.

843 After these songs, the *nakanga* instructs the woman and her husband in the care they must take until after the child is born. Macdonald says, speaking of the instructions "but of the quality, we prefer to be silent." [1] What a pity he allows no one else to judge!

The woman is especially cautioned against sitting with her legs crossed; they must be kept apart lest the child in her womb be suffocated. She is also told many useful things concerning her pregnancy and confinement. The husband is cautioned to cease intercourse with his wife or if he has intercourse, his wife may not lie on her back, lest the child be injured.

[751] While this instruction is going on, all the assembled women cook and eat the feast which has been made for them. When all has been said, the *nakanga* anoints the man with castor oil, which has in the meantime been warmed, and ties round the neck of the woman the *litiwo*, a cord made of plaited bark-cloth with a tassel in front; at the base of the tassel white beads are strung for good luck, and at the end of the tassel, red beads are affixed, having symbolic reference to the haemorrhage at the time of childbirth. The woman wears only a strip of calico of two hands breadth called *nilelu*. She is anointed on the head, body, and limbs.

The tying of the *litiwo* is the sign for dancing to begin. It is a dance in which women try to excel one another. They come with all their tattoo marks on buttocks, thighs, and abdomen renovated; they wear diaper-fashion a narrow strip of cloth, always black in color, and round their bodies numerous strings of beads. With the beginning of the dancing, their other clothes are thrown off and practically naked, they vie with one other in exhibiting their charms and skill in dancing, which afterwards becomes the subject of much discussion among the women onlookers. "So and so is really too old and skinny for such exhibition," and "So and so has buttocks as flat as a wall," while "Such and such a one is fat and beautiful and dances wonderfully, with such *abundos*," etc. In front of the woman [431] is set a wooden plate, in front of the man a mat, and on these are thrown donations by the dancers and onlookers, consisting of beads etc., or nowadays pennies and small silver coins to help to pay the expenses of the entertainment and, in the woman's case, to buy medicine which may be necessary should the baby fall ill. When the wedded couple are

[1] Africana, op. cit., vol. I, p. 129.